





The Dead Lake Cave Sleep-Out

From the Mary Alice Dear Hunt Brown High School Album c 1950–1951

Reflections

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Tucked deep in one of my mother's high school albums was a series of photographs I nearly overlooked. At first glance, they looked like nothing more than a group of girls camping — until I noticed the jagged stone ceiling and realized they were inside the cave at Dead Lake.

The year was around 1950 or '51. My mother, Mary Alice Dear, and her classmates from Camas High School had organized what appears to have been a senior sleep-out. The cave, carved into the basalt rocks near Fallen Leaf Lake, was long known among local teenagers as a small but reliable shelter — just large enough for a group of brave friends, sleeping bags, and a box or two of soda pop—or cigarettes.

The names in these photos have slowly come back into focus: Emma Darlene Schultz (Green), Lorraine Duncan, and Janet Deweese, among them. Their faces and laughter speak to the optimism of a generation growing up in a mill town at mid-century — the same years my mother served as class president and editor of the school paper.

When I shared these images online decades later, something unexpected happened. Dozens of people from Camas began recalling their own nights in that same cave — through the 1960s, '70s, and '80s — confirming that the tradition endured long after my mother's class graduated. Some remembered the rope swing nearby; others described sneaking smokes or singing songs in the dark — even a little skinny-dipping.

What struck me most was how many lifelong locals had never heard of the cave at all. It reminded me how quickly local knowledge can disappear — the small geographies that hold generations of memory. Whether or not kids still sleep there today, these photos preserve a piece of that living landscape.

The Dead Lake Cave may be no more than a hollow in the basalt, but in these photographs it becomes something larger — a shared space of courage, camaraderie, laughter, and belonging that outlasts the years and those who once gathered there.





















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Dead Lake Cave Photo Index

Dead Lake Cave 1

Lorraine Duncan on the left wearing glasses and a rain slicker. Janet Deweese on the right wearing a scarf. Newspapers and bedding on the ground.

Dead Lake Cave 2

Mary Alice Dear Hunt sitting in a sleeping bag with a satin blanket and box nearby.

Dead Lake Cave 3

Two girls sitting on bedding deeper inside the cave. Identities not confirmed.

Dead Lake Cave 4

Janet Deweese seated against the wall of the cave with a small box in her lap.

Dead Lake Cave 5

Group standing near the cave entrance. Figures partly illuminated by flash. Identities not confirmed.

Dead Lake Cave 6

Lorraine Duncan on the left in back. Janet Deweese at right in the back. Mary Alice Dear Hunt on the left front.

Dead Lake Cave 7

Three girls seated together along the wall of the cave. Lorraine Duncan in the center. Other identities not confirmed.

Dead Lake Cave 8

Janet Deweese on the left. Mary Alice Dear Hunt on the right in back.

Dead Lake Cave 9

Two girls posing near the mouth of the cave. Identities not confirmed.

Dead Lake Cave 10

Mary Alice Dear Hunt pretending to sleep.